

**Abstract 613**

**TITLE:** Obstacles to Needle Exchange Participation in Rhode Island

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**OBJECTIVE:** This study explores obstacles to participation in needle exchange programs (NEPs) among injection drug users (IDUs) in Rhode Island.

**METHODS:** A written questionnaire was administered at two Rhode Island drug detoxification sites in 1998.

**RESULTS:** 488 self-administered surveys were completed, 226 (46.3%) had injected drugs in the past 6 months. Of these, 62.1% reported sharing syringes in the past 6 months, and each syringe was used a mean 10.7 times. Among all IDUs surveyed, 510% had participated in a NEP. Major obstacles to NEP participation were a lack of awareness of the program (25.6%), inconvenient location or hours (15.9%), and fear of identification and/or police harassment (12.2%). Non-white race was a significant predictor of being unaware of the NEP ( $p=0.01$ ) and not participating in NEP ( $p=0.03$ ). The NEP referred 13.1% of injection drug users who used the NEP to the detoxification program.

**CONCLUSIONS:** NEPs are important in reducing the spread of blood-borne pathogens among IDUs and are effective referral sources for drug treatment. Surveys of IDUs at sites other than NEPs, such as detoxification facilities, can identify local obstacles to the use of NEPs.

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